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DOCTOR STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
AT LAST! THE MIND-BOGGLING CONCLUSION OF THE CREATORS CHRONICLES!
BRUNNER
NOW SLAYS THE
IN-BETWEENER!

Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

Stan Lee presents: Dr. STRANGE master of the MYSTIC ARTS!™

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FATE...LIKE A WHEEL

"MY WORST FEARS HAVE BEEN REALIZED!
"STEPHEN STRANGE HAS CHALLENGED THE ALL-POWERFUL IN-BETWEENER—
"—AND WE ARE POWERLESS TO HELP HIM!"

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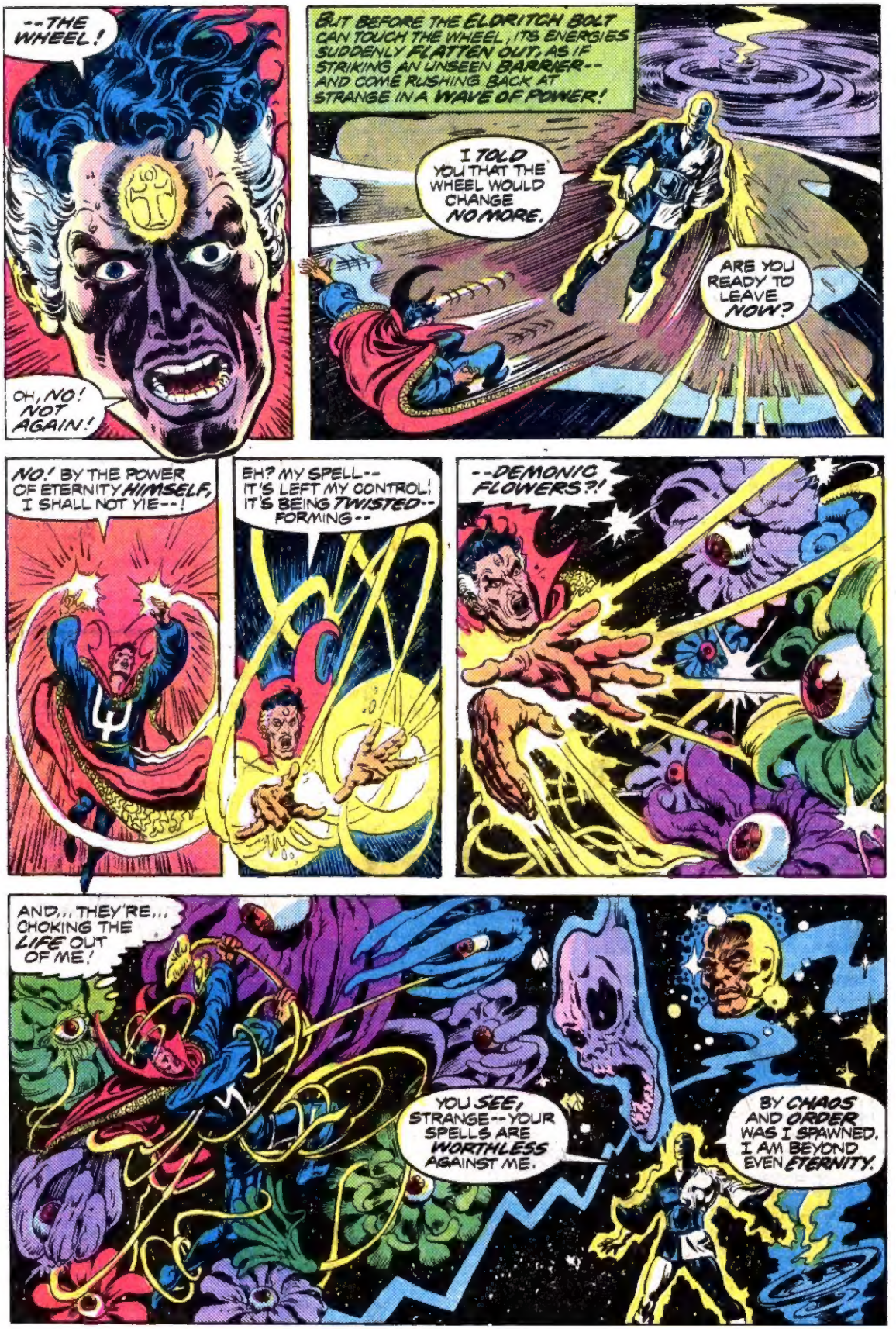
ANCIENT ONE, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND--WHO IS THE IN-BETWEENER?
NOT "WHO", CLEA--BUT "WHAT"! HE IS A SENTIENT CONCEPT--A LIVING COSMIC BALANCE.
MANY PARDONS, REVERED SIR, BUT THIS IS ALL QUITE BEYOND ME. MY POOR MIND IS TAXED BY THE MERE SYSHT OF YOU IN PHYSICAL FORM!
I ECHO YOUR CONFUSION, WONG--BUT THE ANCIENT ONE DID TELL US HOW HE CEASED TO BE ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE WHEN IT WAS... ALTERED.
AYE, 'TIS TOO TRUE. I ONLY WISH STEPHEN HAD ALLOWED ME TO ACCOMPANY HIM--
--FACING THE IN-BETWEENER ALONE COULD MEAN HIS DEATH.
#ISSUE#25--ARCH.
D-DEATH?
OH, STEPHEN... NO.
IS THERE NOTHING WE CAN DO TO HELP HIM? NOTHING AT ALL?
FOR THE PRESENT--NO!
SO MAD IS THE DIMENSION IN WHICH HE BATTLES, THAT IT TAKES ALL OF MY SKILL TO KEEP HIS IMAGE AT HAND.
IF WE ARE TO AID HIM AT ALL, WE MUST WATCH AND WAIT.
AYE,,,AND PRAY.
AS THE ONLY THREE SANE BEINGS LEFT IN THE UNIVERSE CONCENTRATE ON THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO, THE INTERMITTENT RAINS SLOWLY DRIZZLE TO A STOP--
--AND THE CLOUDS PART TO DISPLAY THE CELESTIAL PRESENCE OF THE CREATORS--
--SORCERERS TURNED TO STARS! THEIR COSMIC LAUGHTER SEEMS TO FILTER DOWN FROM ON HIGH--

--WHILE IN ANOTHER, EVEN MADDER DIMENSION...
YOU TRULY INTEND TO TRY TAKING THE COSMIC WHEEL FROM ME, STRANGE?
I DO.
THEN YOU ARE THE GREATEST FOOL IN CREATION.
NO--NOT A FOOL, IN-BETWEENER--JUST A MAN--
--A MAN DETERMINED TO RESTORE HIS COSMOS TO NORMALCY!
AND AS I NEED THE WHEEL TO DO THAT, I SHALL HAVE IT!
YOU PRESUME TOO MUCH, STRANGE. I SHALL NOT LET YOU HAVE THE WHEEL--AND YOU CANNOT SEIZE IT FROM ME.
BY HOGGOTH, I SHALL!
AND, ENCASED IN THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK, YOU WILL NOT STOP ME!

YOU TRULY THINK THAT?
I-I DO NOT BELIEVE IT! YOU SUNDERED THE CRIMSON BANDS AS IF THEY WEREN'T EVEN THERE!
BUT OF COURSE.
YOUR SPELLS CANNOT TOUCH ME-- I AM APART FROM SUCH THINGS.
OH, I REALIZE YOUR WISH TO ALTER THE SPIN OF THE WHEEL OF CHANGE COMES FROM YOUR SENSE OF DUTY.
YOU WISH TO RESTORE YOUR UNIVERSE--BUT IT SHALL NOT BE ALLOWED! TO DO SO WOULD WRECK THE COSMIC BALANCE.
MY BALANCE OF LIFE AND DEATH FORCES WILL NOT BE ALTERED FOR ANYONE!
I WILL NOT ACCEPT THAT, IN-BETWEENER!
THEN, AS I SAID, YOU ARE A FOOL.
YOU CANNOT HOPE TO GET TO THE WHEEL PAST MY MULTIPLE INCARNATIONS.
EVEN A THOUSAND, THOUSAND FOES WILL NOT STAY ME, IN-BETWEENER!
MY CONJURATIONS--
WILL DO NO GOOD, NO MATTER HOW FEW I NUMBER.
BY THE MYSTIC MOONS, MY SPELL WENT RIGHT THROUGH YOU!
IT-IT'S HEADED FOR--

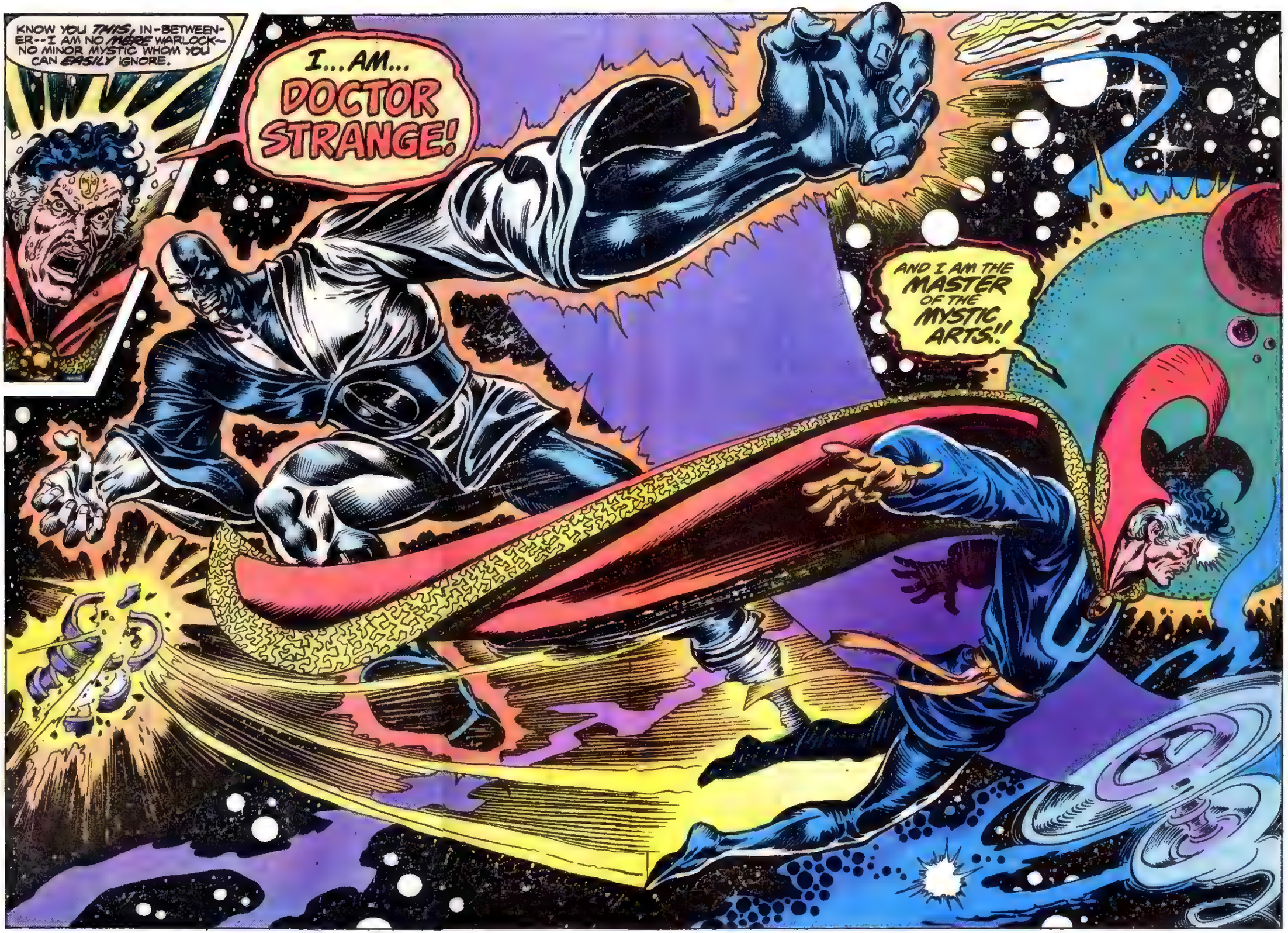

--THE WHEEL!
OH, NO! NOT AGAIN!
BUT BEFORE THE ELDRITCH BOLT CAN TOUCH THE WHEEL, ITS ENERGIES SUDDENLY FLATTEN OUT, AS IF STRIKING AN UNSEEN BARRIER-- AND COME RUSHING BACK AT STRANGE IN A WAVE OF POWER!
I TOLD YOU THAT THE WHEEL WOULD CHANGE NO MORE.
ARE YOU READY TO LEAVE NOW?
NO! BY THE POWER OF ETERNITY HIMSELF, I SHALL NOT YIE--!
EH? MY SPELL-- IT'S LEFT MY CONTROL! IT'S BEING TWISTED-- FORMING--
--DEMONIC FLOWERS?!
AND,,, THEY'RE,,, CHOKING THE LIFE OUT OF ME!
YOU SEE, STRANGE--YOUR SPELLS ARE WORTHLESS AGAINST ME.
BY CHAOS AND ORDER WAS I SPAWNED. I AM BEYOND EVEN ETERNITY.

BUT DEATH BY FLOWERS IS A RATHER IGNOMINIOUS END.
A TOUCH, AND THEY SHALL RELEASE YOU.
AFTER ALL, I DO NOT WISH YOU ANY HARM.
BUT WHY? WHHYYY?
STILL YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND? VERY WELL, THEN--
--I SHALL SHOW YOU THE EXTENT OF MY POWER.
AS YOU CAN SEE, YOU ARE QUITE HELPLESS--
--TRAPPED BETWEEN LEVELS OF REALITY.
SUCH IS BUT A FRACTION OF MY POWERS, FOR I CAN AFFECT ALL REALITY-- ALL FANTASY.
THERE IS NOTHING I CANNOT AFFECT-- AND CONVERSELY, THERE IS NOTHING WHICH CAN AFFECT ME.
"BUT I SENSE THAT YOU STILL DO NOT COMPREHEND THE TOTAL FUTILITY OF CHALLENGING ME.
"YOU WILL HAVE TO BE TAUGHT, I SUPPOSE."

UNDERSTAND, STRANGE--I DO THIS NOT OUT OF HATRED, FOR EMOTION IS ALIEN TO ME.
I MERELY WISH TO DEMONSTRATE HOW, AT MY SLIGHTEST EFFORT--
--YOU COULD BE BOUND FOR ALL TIME ON ANY OF A BILLION WORLDS--
--AT THE MERCY OF PRIMITIVE CULTS--
--AT THE BOTTOM OF A BRINY OCEAN--
--OR EVEN DEEP WITHIN SOLID ROCK.
I COULD SEND YOU SAILING TO THE ENDS OF INFINITY, OR...
BY THE VISHANTI--IT CANNOT BE!
OH, YES, STRANGE. YOU COULD EVEN BE BOUND AND HELPLESS IN YOUR OWN SANCTUM SANCTORUM.
WHAT?
STEPHEN?

MASTER! MASTER, YOU MUST FIGHT IT!
YES, STEPHEN-- YOU MUST BREAK FREE!
CLEA! GET BACK! GET BAAACCCC;
AND NOW THAT YOU ARE HERE AGAIN, I SHALL DISSOLVE YOUR BONDS.
I TRUST YOU SEE THE FUTILITY NOW.
FUTILITY? YES... HA-HA... IT IS FUTILE, ISN'T IT?
HA-HA! IMAGINE ...ME... FIGHTING YOU! HA-HA-HAH!
WHY... WHY THE WHOLE IDEA IS QUITE MAD!
QUITE... HA-HA... INSANE!!
NOOO!! I WILL NOT SUBMIT TO MADNESS!
THOUGH INSANITY THRIVES IN THIS REALM... I... WILL ...NOT... SUCCUMB!
DESPITE ALL ELSE, I SHALL STAY SANE!
YOU IMPRESS ME, STRANGE. I DID NOT EXPECT SUCH PRESENCE OF MIND FROM A MORTAL.
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD STAY BOUND.

MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
QUICKLY, WONG-- THE ORB!
NO--LET ME, ANCIENT ONE! STEPHEN NEEDS MY... OUR HELP NOW!
YES, NOW IS THE TIME! HE HAS JUST ENDURED A GREAT ORDEAL.
THEN WE MUST POOL OUR POWER-- CONCENTRATE IT THRU THE ORB.
THUS...
MY SON, BE THOU AT PEACE-- LET CLEA'S AND MY CONSCIOUS-NESS WASH OVER YOU--
--AND RENEW YOU.
I THANK YOU, ANCIENT ONE. YOU HAVE GAINED ME THE PAUSE I NEEDED. NOW I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO.
IN-BETWEENER! I AM READY FOR YOU NOW!
INDEED? YOUR PERSER-VERANCE IS AMAZING--
--PERHAPS EVEN GREATER THAN THAT OF ADAM WARLOCK.


KNOW YOU THIS, IN-BETWEENER--I AM NO MERE WARLOCK--NO MINOR MYSTIC WHOM YOU CAN EASILY IGNORE.
I...AM... DOCTOR STRANGE!
AND I AM THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!!

YOUR PROWESS IS REMARKABLE, STRANGE-- BUT 'TWILL DO YOU LITTLE GOOD.
YOU'LL NOT POSSESS THE WHEEL.
YOU ARE WRONG, IN-BETWEENER--YOU ARE WRONG ABOUT MANY THINGS!
YOU ARE NOT AS OMNIPOTENT AS YOU MAY THINK--
--FOR THERE IS NOTHING, REAL OR IMAGINED, WHICH IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE POWER OF ITS CREATOR--
--NOT EVEN THAT WHICH DWELLS IN-BETWEEN!
AND SO, I CALL NOW UPON ALL THE POWER AND MIGHT OF--
--CHAOS--
--AND ORDER--
--TOGETHER!
WITH MY MIND FINALLY FREE OF THIS REALM'S MADNESS, I ALONE AM CAPABLE OF TURNING THIS POWER UPON YOU--
--THE POWER OF YOUR OWN BEING!
WHAT?
THIS CANNOT BE!
I WAS--
--CREATED TO BE--
--ALL POWERFUL!

AT ONCE, THE STARTLED IN-BETWEENER IS AWASH IN A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MAGICKAL FORCES--
--AS THE MYSTIC MASTER CONDUCTS A VERITABLE SYMPHONY OF OCCULT SPELLS--
--BACKING HIS ARCANE INCANTATIONS WITH THE TRANSCENDENT MIGHT OF LORD CHAOS AND MASTER ORDER--
--UNTIL THE COSMIC BALANCER IS OVERWHELMED BY THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS TUMULT.
IT IS BEYOND BELIEF!
I HAVE BEEN BESTED--
--BY A MORTAL BEING!
ONLY IN A SEMANTICAL SENSE, IN-BETWEENER, AS YOU ARE NOT A CREATURE OF CONFLICT, YOU CANNOT TRULY BE DEFEATED.
BUT YOU HAVE BEEN HUMBLED.

AND FOR THAT, I AM MOST SORRY. I KNOW THAT YOU DID BUT OBEY YOUR NATURE.
BUT, POWERFUL AS YOU ARE, YOU ARE NOT ALL-KNOWING.
IN EMPOWERING THE CREATORS, * YOU MADE A GRIEVOUS ERROR!
* SEE LAST ISSUE -- ARCH.
YOU SEE? UPON MY FOREHEAD BURNS THE SIGN OF THE ANKH! IT HAS APPEARED DURING OUR BATTLE BECAUSE I AM A FORCE FOR LIFE!
I HAVE MET DEATH, IN BETWEENER -- MET IT AND WON! *
MY UNIVERSE WAS NOT OUT-OF-BALANCE IN FAVOR OF DEATH -- AS YOU BELIEVED.
* IN THE NOW CLASSIC ISSUE #4 -- A.G.
SO, WITH THE CREATORS TRANSFORMED BY YOUR WHEEL, MY COSMOS WAS STILL DENIED YOUR PRECIOUS BALANCE.
THROUGH YOUR EFFORTS, IT IS NOW OVER-BALANCED IN FAVOR OF LIFE!
HOW IRONIC THAT -- THROUGH MY "INTERFERENCE" -- THE BALANCE YOU SOUGHT MAY YET BE ACHIEVED!
HAVE A CARE, SORCERER! SHOULD YOU TURN THE WHEEL TOO FAR, ALL EXISTENCE COULD CEASE!
I KNOW, IN-BETWEENER... I KNOW ALL TOO WELL.
FOR A SECOND, THE MYSTIC DRAWS A LONG, WORRIED BREATH, AND THEN, HIS BROW FURROWED IN CONCENTRATION --

--HE GRIPS THE WHEEL AND TWISTS HARD--
IN THE NAME OF THE ALL-SEEING-- LET MY COSMOS BE RESTORED!
--CHANNELING ALL OF HIS MYSTIC MIGHT INTO ALTERING THE PITCH OF THIS COSMIC WHEEL OF CHANGE.
SPINNING OFF FROM THE WHEEL, STRANGE SUDDENLY FINDS HIMSELF PLUNGING HELPLESSLY INTO AN INTER-DIMENSIONAL WHIRLPOOL--
--AND THEN, HIS ENTIRE UNIVERSE SEEMS TO TURN IN ON ITSELF!

ONWARD, STRANGE PLUNGES THROUGH THE TIME/SPACE VORTEX--AND IT SEEMS AS IF HE CAN HEAR THE VOICES OF A THOUSAND STARS... SCREAMING.
THUS, WHEN HE FINALLY FINDS HIMSELF ON EARTH, HE IS LEFT WITH THE DEEP FEELING THAT...
I...HAVE WON...
STEPHEN!
OH, STEPHEN--WE SAW IT ALL IN THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO. YOU DID IT! THE UNIVERSE IS WHOLE!
INDEED, MY SON, YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF MOST WORTHY.
NE'ER HAVE I FELT MORE SECURE IN LEAVING THIS WORLD IN YOUR CARE.
AS FOR MYSELF, I MUST AGAIN RENOUNCE THE PHYSICAL FORM.
MAY THE VISHANTI BE WITH YOU, MY CHILDREN.
I GO NOW, ONCE MORE, TO BE ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE.

LOOK, CLEA--THE TRUE STARS ONCE AGAIN SHINE IN THE HEAVENS! 'TIS FINAL PROOF OF THE CREATORS' DEFEAT.
STEPHEN... IT SUDDENLY OCCURS TO ME... YOU ARE AS POWERFUL AS YOU EVER WERE! YOU MUST BE!
POWER? THAT IS THE PROPERTY OF THE STARS... OF THE STORM. A SORCERER'S POWER IS IN HIS KNOWLEDGE--
--AND ONCE GAINED, IT IS NEVER LOST.
THEN... YOU ARE STILL THE SORCERER SUPREME?
THAT IS... MERELY A TITLE, MY LOVE-- A TITLE WHICH OTHERS MAY GIVE, BUT WHICH NO ONE CAN EVER TRULY CLAIM.
AFTER ALL, A TRUE SORCERER SUPREME MUST MAINTAIN AT LEAST A MODICUM OF HUMILITY.. NO?
COME, LET'S BE OUT OF THIS RAIN.
AND AS THE SKIES UNLEASH THEIR WATERS... ALL IS AT PEACE.
NEXT ISSUE: HE WHO STALKS...
(POSSIBLY THE MOST OFF-BEAT STRANGE STORY IN 14 YEARS!)